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FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9090
INFO RUCNCAN/ALL CANADIAN POSTS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS OTTAWA 000134

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: CANADA REITERATES FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES

REF: OTTAWA 132

11. (SBU) Summary: In separate remarks on February 23, Canada's top two diplomats reiterated Canada's top foreign policy priorities -- relations with the U.S., the Americas, Afghanistan, and emerging markets in Asia -- and its support for humanitarian aid to Gaza. Canada will further narrow its priority targets for assistance from 25 to 20 (including six in the Americas) under the government's "Aid Effectiveness Agenda." End summary.

TOP PRIORITIES

12. (U) On the same day that Prime Minister Stephen Harper was making a major public relations push in New York City, and on the eve of Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon's meeting with Secretary Clinton in Washington, FM Cannon on February 23 reiterated the foreign policy priorities of the government in a public speech, while Minister for International Cooperation Bev Oda announced a reduction in priority assistance targets from 25 to 20.

13. (U) FM Cannon underscored that relations with the U.S. remained Canada's top priority, noting that "there is no question that the continued good health of this relationship is vital to our prosperity." He said that Canada agreed with the U.S. that "a secure and efficient border must be a central priority to ensure the steady movement of goods, [and] services and be able to deter terrorism." He added, however, that the U.S. "is not the entirety of our neighborhood" and cited the Americas as an "area of dynamic economic growth" and as another top policy priority.

14. (U) FM Cannon also reminded his audience of Canada's ongoing commitment to Afghanistan -- the largest recipient of Canadian assistance. He described improvement of relations with the emerging markets of Asia -- "a major driving force in the global economy" -- as another top priority, and said that he would visit India in March as well as that Canada would open six new trade offices in China.

15. (U) FM Cannon voiced support for greater international assistance to "quickly and effectively help the people of Gaza rebuild their lives," and commented that "peace and security in the Middle East region has to be sustainable and durable," while insisting that Canadian policy in the Middle East was "balanced" and not biased toward Israel. One of his staffers subsequently indicated to reporters that FM Cannon might attend the March 2 Sharm al-Sheik conference on Gaza (reftel).

TARGETED AID RECIPIENTS

16. (U) Minister Oda's separate announcement described the government's "Aid Effectiveness Agenda" to "make our aid dollars go further and make a greater difference for those we help," while still helping the people "in greatest need." She announced that the 20 top targets of focus (which will receive about 80 pct of all bilateral assistance) will include:

- Afghanistan
- Bangladesh
- Bolivia

-- the Caribbean
-- Colombia
-- Ethiopia
-- Ghana
-- Haiti
-- Honduras
-- Indonesia
-- Mali
-- Mozambique
-- Pakistan
-- Peru
-- Senegal
-- Sudan
-- Tanzania
-- Ukraine
-- Vietnam
-- West Bank/Gaza.

17. (U) The new list includes five recipients from the Americas -- Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Honduras, and the Caribbean -- that were not previous priority aid targets. Minister Oda confirmed that "there will be, again, a new approach to the Americas."

18. (SBU) Oda's announcement stimulated a mild firestorm in the House of Commons' Question Period on February 24, with opposition MPs charging that the government was abandoning Africa and francophone countries. Oda clarified that 45 pct of Canada's assistance would go to Qcountries. Oda clarified that 45 pct of Canada's assistance would still go to Africa and that the government would meet its pledge to double its assistance (from 2001 levels) to Africa by 2010.
HOPPER